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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001506

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
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DIA FOR LARSON/CRONIN/KRAUSE  
P FOR DRUSSEL, RRANGASWAMY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2018  
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR MCAP MARR IR LE  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: USDP EDELMAN MEETS LEBANESE ARMY COMMANDER

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) In an October 17 meeting with visiting USDP Edelman, a confident new Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Kahwagi discussed his vision for the army as well as priority equipment requirements. Kahwagi also provided an update on the current situation in city of Tripoli in the north and recent Syrian troop deployments along Lebanon's northern border. USDP Edelman stressed the enduring nature of the U.S.-Lebanon relationship. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, accompanied by Ambassador, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Chris Straub, CENTCOM J-5 Major General Robert Allardice, Military Assistant Colonel Patricia Warren, OSD Lebanon Desk Officer Melissa Dalton and Embassy Defense Attaché and ODC Chief, visited LAF Commander General Jean Kahwagi in his office at LAF Headquarters in Yarze on October 17.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH  
LEBANON IS ENDURING

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¶3. (C) USDP Edelman opened the meeting by recounting the positive feedback he had from Assistant Secretary of Defense Mary Beth Long after the inaugural Joint Military Commission (JMC), which took place on October 6. USDP Edelman stressed that there would be continuity in the relationship in the upcoming U.S. transition. USDP Edelman told Kahwagi that he had spoken with incoming CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus about Lebanon and that both he and Petraeus agreed on the importance of the U.S. relationship with Lebanon.

KAHWAGI ON EQUIPMENT NEEDS

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¶4. (C) Kahwagi expressed his hope that the transition in Washington would be smooth for everyone involved. General

Kahwagi thanked USDP Edelman for having traveled so far to come to Lebanon for the benefit of the Army saying, "I hope this visit will expedite (delivery of) the items in the JMC program." While only in command of the Army for a little over a month, Kahwagi told USDP Edelman that he has been able to delve into the details of the US security assistance program. While grateful for the assistance provided, Kahwagi noted "it is a little slow in arriving." Kahwagi recalled that there had been agreement during the JMC to conduct an inspection of the AH-1 Cobra helicopters in Jordan. He asked for an update. MG Allardice told General Kahwagi that a tri-lateral meeting between the US, Lebanon and Jordan was scheduled for November 18 to discuss the AH-1 Cobras and the M-60 tanks.

¶5. (C) Kahwagi did not appear to have made up his mind yet on helicopter options. "Maybe the Cobra will not meet our requirements because of spare parts," said Kahwagi. Kahwagi then suggested that UH-60 Blackhawks should also be considered as he needs transport in addition to attack helicopters. "I'm sure you want me to fight terrorism here. I need the means to do this," said Kahwagi. Kahwagi told USDP Edelman that he was concerned about an "Israeli veto" over U.S. assistance to Lebanon, specifically with regards to helicopters. USDP Edelman explained the U.S. congressional notification process regarding proposed transfers. Edelman praised the LAF's five year plan and said that this plan would be briefed to the Hill.

¶6. (C) Kahwagi noted the timeline of the fight against the al Qaeda-inspired Fatah Al Islam in the Nahr Al Bared refugee

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camp in 2007. "It took us three months to win this fight," said Kahwagi. According to Kahwagi, the culminating point for the terrorists in the camp came when the LAF started dropping unguided 500 pound gravity bombs on terrorist positions. While acknowledging the earlier role of US provided 50 caliber sniper rifles in the fight, Kahwagi said that the bombing was the final element that broke the will of the terrorists to resist.

¶7. (C) General Allardice suggested that there might be a fixed wing aircraft option that the LAF could use for counter-terrorism strike missions, such as the Cessna Caravan armed with Hellfire missiles. Kahwagi responded, "my dreams would be answered with something like this." General Allardice said that the best way to begin the process of looking for solutions for the LAF is for the LAF to submit a formal letter of request outlining their requirements.

COMBATTING TERRORISM; UPDATE ON TRIPOLI

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¶8. (C) Kahwagi informed Edelman that the LAF had broken up a terrorist network in the Tripoli area during the week of October 6. The LAF arrested thirteen members of the network and is continuing to exploit intelligence gathered during those operations. Three recent terrorist incidents had occurred at or near LAF facilities: the explosion in Abdi was directed at the LAF Intelligence office; the explosion at Tel circle killed eleven LAF soldiers; the road side bomb at Bahsas circle killed four LAF soldiers and wounded another twenty. Kahwagi told us that Abdul Ghani Jawhar remains at large and is the primary person responsible for these attacks. Kahwagi said that Jawhar is not an associate of Fatah al Islam (FAI), but that he is sympathetic to FAI. Kahwagi said that the LAF nearly captured him recently, but his sister warned him as the LAF was approaching his house at two in the morning. "But I have thirteen of his guys now and know many of his plans," said Kahwagi.

¶9. (C) According to Kahwagi, Jawhar's group planned to conduct suicide operations on a bus in Jbeil, a Christian area just north of Beirut. They also planned to conduct attacks on the Internal Security Forces in Achrafieyya, a

central district in Beirut. Kahwagi told us that the thirteen detainees are all related to people in either the Ain Al Hilweh or the Beddawi Palestinian refugee camps. Kahwagi recounted his trip to the hospital to see his wounded soldiers after the Bahsas bombing. "I told them no one attacks the Army and gets away with it. We will find them all," said Kahwagi. (Note: In the middle of this exchange, Kahwagi received a phone call that another suspected terrorist had been captured in the Bekaa valley. End Note.)

SYRIAN TROOPS ON NORTHERN BORDER

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¶10. (C) Regarding the recent reports of deployment of Syrian troops to the northern border of Lebanon, Kahwagi did not appear overly concerned. Kahwagi told us that he was in contact with Syrian Chief of Staff General Habib both before and after the Syrian deployment. Kahwagi explained that there were no more than ten to fifteen Syrian tanks deployed along the entirety of the northern border. To date, the Syrian forces have remained 800 meters to two kilometers inside Syrian territory, according to Kahwagi.

¶11. (C) Under Secretary Edelman has cleared this cable.  
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